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The Book called by the Jews

KOHELETH

NEWLY TRANSLATED

WITH INTRODUCTION, ANALYSIS, AND NOTES

BY THE

REV. W. H. B. PROBY, M.A.

Formerly Tyrwhitt Hebrew Scholar in the University of Cambridge

RIVINGTONS

London, Oxford, and Cambridge

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PREFACE.

In the following pages the reader has the result of a humble attempt to elucidate a difficult part of God's holy Word: a part, however, which will, in the translator's humble opinion, have a special importance in those days of trial which to all appearance are fast approaching.

The work is, as stated on the title-page, "for English readers:" hence scarcely any of those points of Hebrew grammar, notices of which can be seen in most of the Commentators, will be found touched upon here; the exceptions being where some reference to them was judged necessary for the purpose of justifying either the present translation, or the translator's view of the argument. Those who wish to study the peculiarities of the language, and to see all which can be said upon the several verses, will of course provide themselves with professed commentaries, which this work is not intended to supplant.

In preparing the translation, the commentaries of Ginsburg and Preston (which last embodies Mendelssohn's) have

been of great use, even in cases where the views therein advocated could not be ultimately accepted. So, probably, would Stuart's have been; but we have failed to get a copy.

The following abbreviations have been employed in the notes:—

E.V. *denoting* King James's English Version.

F.V., the French Protestant Version (Geneva, 1647).

G.V., the English Geneva Version, commonly called the Breeches Bible (London, 1615).

LXX., Tischendorf's edition of the Greek Septuagint (Leipsic, 1856).

Vulg., the Latin Vulgate (Paris, 1851).

May the Father of Lights graciously forgive what is herein amiss, and bless this humble work to the comfort and encouragement of His elect!

Feast of Saint Bartholomew, 1874.

TO THE

REV. GODFREY MILNES SYKES, M.A.,

RECTOR OF EAST HATLEY, VICAR OF TADLOW,

RURAL DEAN OF SHINGAY,

AND FORMERLY FELLOW AND TUTOR OF DOWNING COLLEGE, CAMBRIDGE,

This Work is Inscribed,

IN GRATEFUL REMEMBRANCE OF

MANY VALUABLE LESSONS RECEIVED,

AND MUCH KINDNESS ENJOYED,

IN HIS PARISHES AND UNDER HIS ROOF.

INTRODUCTION.

§ 1. Authorship of the Book.

In commencing his work our writer gives himself a threefold designation, viz., "Koheleth, the son of David, king in Jerusalem." The first of these titles is obviously symbolical, and will be examined in the first notes to the text. As to the second, it may be used in reference to any male descendant of David whatsoever: our Lord Jesus Christ was, it is needless to say, called by it. The third title, however, limits the reference to those of David's descendants who were kings; and the terms of ch. i. 12 have been supposed to limit the reference still more narrowly, as Solomon was the only one of David's descendants who was king over *Israel, properly so called:* the sovereigns of the Davidic line who reigned after him having been kings of Judah only.

When, however, we observe that the word "Israel" is continually used in times subsequent to the carrying away of the Ten Tribes, with reference to the tribes of Judah only, it will be evident that its use in this passage can only establish the Salomonic authorship, if on other grounds the date of the book has to be fixed previous to the Assyrian invasion.

We are thus left at liberty to argue for or against the probability of any particular author, or any particular date, from what other data may present themselves.

The tradition of the Jews is unquestionably that Solomon was the writer. But how old this tradition is, is another matter. And even though it could be proved as old as Ezra, yet in the case of a book which, so far as regards itself, is anonymous, we

cannot admit that the assertions either of the synagogue, or even of the church, would be infallible as to authorship. It is the office of God's congregation to declare a book canonical or otherwise; but not to decide questions of authorship, where authorship is not involved in canonicity.

One forcible argument against the Salomonic authorship is derived from "the state of oppression and misery depicted in this Book," and which, as Ginsburg well maintains, "cannot be reconciled with the reign of Solomon, and is therefore against the Salomonic authorship of it." We transcribe the greater part of his observations under this head, omitting those passages which we think inconclusive. "Palestine, the inheritance of the Lord, was then groaning under the oppression of satraps" [rather, we should say, of subordinate rulers], "and presented such a scene of injustice and violence, that death was thought preferable to life, and not to have been born at all was deemed still better (iv. 1—4; v. 7); Asiatic despotism, which permits no will to its subjects, was rampant (viii. 1—4); . . . suddenly raising servants to posts of honour, and hurling the great from their lofty positions (x. 5—7); this tyranny, with its numerous spies, had penetrated into the privacy of families to such a fearful extent that it actually became dangerous to give utterance to one's thoughts even in the secrecy of home (x. 20); wickedness and crime were perpetrated with perfect impunity, so much so, that people were thereby encouraged to commit heinous sins, and were led to deny the moral government of God (viii. 10, 11). . . . The utter impossibility of attempting to reconcile this state of things with the age of Solomon is so manifest, that even Hengstenberg, after giving a summary of those sufferings, according to his analysis of the contents, affirms that, *this being the external and internal condition of God's people, the idea cannot for a moment be entertained that the book belongs to the time of Solomon, and that he was the author of it.*"*

It may be observed again, that although the expression in

* *Coheleth*, pp. 250-1.

i. 16, ii. 9, "*all* that were before me in Jerusalem," must not be pressed too strongly,* yet it makes rather in favour of a later king as the employer of it than Solomon, before whom there had been only one king in Jerusalem of whom an inspired Israelite could take any account in such a connection.

But (as Ginsburg observes further on) "the strongest argument . . . against the Salomonic authorship of this book is its vitiated language and style. We do not allude so much to the numerous Aramaic expressions, which have no parallel in any other portion of Scripture of equal size, . . . but we refer to the whole complexion of it. We could as easily believe that Chaucer is the author of Rasselas, as that Solomon wrote Koheleth."†

For ourselves, we think that HEZEKIAH may claim the authorship of the book better than any one else whose name we know. The difficulty of the language can, we think, be satisfactorily got over, on the consideration that (as Preston points out) the subject of the book is so very different to the subjects of other sacred books: this book being, in fact, of the nature of a philosophical discussion. The works described in ii. 4—6 are such as might have been done by any opulent man; but it is to be observed that one of the details agrees better with what we are told about Hezekiah than with what we are told about any one else, viz., the planning of water-works.‡ With the mention of cattle (ii. 7) compare the mention, in Chronicles, of Hezekiah's "stalls for all manner of beasts, and cotes for flocks. Moreover, he provided him cities, and possessions of flocks and herds in abundance: for God had given him substance very much."§ And with the mention of riches (ii. 8), compare what we are told in the same place about Hezekiah's.‖

One argument adduced by Ginsburg against Solomon's authorship makes very strongly in favour of Hezekiah's. "Coheleth declares, in ii. 18, 19, that he detested all his estates

* כל seems to have the sense of "both" in vii. 18. † *Coheleth*, p. 253.
‡ 2 Chr. xxxii. 30; Is. xxii. 9, 11. § 2 Chr. xxxii. 28, 29. ‖ *Ib.* 27.

which he had toiled to acquire, because he must bequeath them to an utter stranger, who, for aught he knows, may foolishly waste all. Now as this most unquestionably implies that he had no children of his own to inherit his possessions, it could not have been uttered by Solomon, who had an heir-apparent eagerly waiting to succeed him."* Along with this it will be sufficient to remark that Hezekiah had no son until the seventeenth year of his reign.

Ginsburg considers that the oppression and misery described by Koheleth could only have had place under the Persian monarchy. This is, we think, saying too much. That the government of their own kings would bring great misery upon the Israelites had been distinctly foretold by Samuel.† And nine years of Hezekiah's life had been passed under the reign of one of the worst of kings—even King Ahaz. The calamities of that time probably occasioned the composition of Psalm lxxix:‡ the sufferings detailed in which (compare especially the lack of sepulture, vv. 2, 3, with Eccles. vi. 3) are fully equal to any which are implied in our present Book. Then, too, the fourth year of Hezekiah's reign had witnessed the invasion of the territory of the Ten Tribes by Shalmaneser, the carrying of those tribes captive to Assyria, and the resettlement of the land by Assyrian colonists, who must have been under Assyrian governors: all which must have given abundant occasion for such scenes as Koheleth says he had witnessed.

Added to which, the work to which Koheleth says (xii. 9, 10) that he had devoted himself, and of which, apparently, the results are to be seen in the present Book, agrees very well with what we know of Hezekiah, that he superintended an edition of King Solomon's Proverbs.§

On the whole, then, we have very little hesitation in ascribing the authorship of this Book to Hezekiah rather than to Solomon.

* P. 248. † 1 Sam. viii. 11–18. ‡ See Thrupp's remarks *on this* Psalm in his *Introduction on the Study and Use of the Psalms.* § Prov. xxv. 1.

§ 2. Drift and Object.

In discovering what these were, commentators have mixed up two questions which are essentially distinct: viz., *what object had the writer proposed to himself in his former life* and *what object does he propose to himself now in writing the present Book?* Now we may fully admit, in answer to the former question, that the writer had aimed at finding out, for his own advantage, what was man's chief good. This he distinctly asserts in ch. ii. 3. And towards accomplishing this purpose, he had sought to be, in the truest and fullest sense of the word, wise. This also he asserts in the same place; and likewise in ii. 17, vii. 23, 25, viii. 16.

But it is obvious that a man might propose to himself such an end, and might work towards its attainment, and then sit down to write a book, and describe therein with more or less of detail the results of his experience; and yet might have some different object in view with respect to his readers, from that which he had had formerly with respect to himself.

And that the writer of the present book had actually, in writing it, some different object from that which he had had before, will be evident, we think, from the following considerations.

1. If his present object had been one and the same with his former object, viz., to discuss the question of man's chief good, doing so in the former case for his own benefit, and now in this latter case for the benefit of his readers, his argument would surely have had a more positive character than we find it to have. As it is, his argument is almost entirely negative :— "Man's chief good does *not* consist in this thing—nor in that thing—nor in the other thing."

2. If Koheleth had been discussing what the chief good was, and drawing any positive conclusion, we must assume that in such conclusion the chief good is made out to be either *outward pleasure*, or *subjective cheerfulness*, or *religious practice*,

or *general wisdom.* Now the objections which were, or might have been, made with respect to those, and which he notices one by one, do not bear so much upon the comparison of the former things one with another, but rather tend towards a denial of there being any good for man at all.

3. Looking also from the character of the objections adduced, to the answers which Koheleth suggests with more or less of explicitness,—we observe that what little of the positive there is in Koheleth's own argument palpably fails of establishing anything whatever as man's chief good. Doubtless Koheleth shows that cheerfulness in diligence, along with the fear of God and keeping His commandments, are the best things for man generally, as things are; but the main objections which lie against these as being absolutely man's highest good remain unanswered. So far as argument goes, nothing is established at all.

4. Some of the arguments employed are quite beside the question of man's chief good. More than once Koheleth insists on man's ignorance of God's working: what has this to do with man's chief good? He admits, too (iii. 1, vi. 10), that events are predestinated by God, each in its own time: how does this bear upon the question? What have oppressions (iv. 1, &c.) to do with the chief good? To what purpose, in view of such a thing, is absence of prosperity cited (vi. 3, 6)?

In inquiring what the object was with which the Book was written, it may be well to bear in mind that it cannot be assumed necessary that the writer should tell his readers of it distinctly and explicitly. This consideration has the more force, from the fact that whoever was the human writer, GOD THE HOLY GHOST must be considered as the AUTHOR. And God, of whom Elihu says that "He giveth not account of any of His matters,"* might in His wisdom deem it enough to give His people a certain book to read, and to act thereupon accordingly as conscience might whisper or the Spirit might prompt, and then have His end answered in His people, whether they knew

* Job xxxiii. 13.

how it was brought to pass, or whether they remained in ignorance. And such a plan of reserve is more likely to be employed where the conclusion to be attained is rather practical than theoretical, and when the practice to be inculcated is of a peculiarly plain and ordinary character—such as might occasion men to say, with some feeling of disappointment, "Is this absolutely all which you had to tell us?" All this squares exactly with what we find in the Book before us.

If, now, with a view to discovering the writer's drift and object, we confine ourselves to observing the several things in the Book which meet our notice, we perceive that the greater part of the Book consists of objections, drawn from various sources, and which lie, or may be conceived to lie, against one part or another of God's moral government of the world. And these objections are summed up both at the beginning and at the end in the general assertion—"Most vain! all is vanity." The tone of them, moreover, seems to have a certain amount of scorn in it: one evident instance may be seen in ix. 4, 5.

There are numerous passages in the Book which have an unmistakeably proverbial character. Some of these express the sentiments of the supposed objector, while others express what is more or less a reply to his objection. The existence of these proverbial passages indicates that the sentiments therein expressed passed current with a large number of people; and the embodying them in the present Book indicates that of those people the writer does for the time make himself one.

There is evidently somewhat of a dialogue in some parts of the Book: *e.g.*, in vii. 16, 17. And when it is remembered how often in Hebrew writings such expressions as "saying," "he said," "it may be said," and the like, are understood rather than expressed, it will very soon appear that the like character may reasonably be ascribed to several parts of the Book where, to persons ignorant of this usage, no dialogue would be perceptible at all; the context forming in such cases our only guide. We notice, too, in one passage (vii. 25) the expression "I and my

heart;" and infer that there at least the writer has two different characters to sustain; and if there, then possibly in other passages also.

We find, moreover, numerous precepts in the Book, given apparently in answer to the supposed objector: but in none of these do we meet with the expression "my son," so common in the Book of Proverbs, save in the last (xii. 12): and then it is in a sort of epilogue, the main part of the work having been previously brought to a close. As far as this goes, it indicates that that is the only precept which the reader is to take as coming from the writer's own self directly.

These considerations will have prepared the reader for understanding what is the position which the writer of the Book takes up in it for himself. Throughout the whole Book, except in the conclusion, Koheleth puts himself into the objector's position: not identifying himself with the objector absolutely and so as to lose his own identity, but mentioning the objections in all their force, and not only as understanding them, but as feeling them. This is palpably the case in iii. 18, iv. 2, viii. 15. So much indeed has this been felt by one learned and pious author, that in order to account for it he has adopted the strange theory that this Book was written by a wicked man and for a wicked end, viz., to cast a sneer at the faith and practice of God's people; and that its insertion into the sacred canon is an instance of that overruling Providence which brings good out of evil!

And the general drift and object of the work appears to be this: whereas many persons might be tempted to doubt or deny the reality of God's moral government, the sacred writer was desirous of assisting their faith, and of encouraging their perseverance in well-doing. In carrying out this design, he first details his own thoughts and doings, those in which, having been a king, he stood alone; and then descends to the level of his readers, and puts himself (as we have seen) along with them: which he was able to do all the more, as he himself either had

been, or was then being, tried with these same objections against God's moral government which he here mentions. And in discussing these several objections, his method is to admit the full truth of each; dwelling upon them in all their aspects, recurring to one and another again and again, when it occurs to him from a different point. He himself had found vanity in scientific knowledge, vanity in pleasure, vanity in riches, vanity in work, vanity even in wisdom: and he owns it, and then adds numerous instances of the same thing, partly drawn from his own observation, and partly also from the maxims generally allowed among men. While, however, bringing up all the objections which are, or might conceivably be, grounded hereupon, he even now and then notices in passing some truth which the objection involves, and of which he means to make use by-and-by. Thus it is that the truths of God's apportioning to each man his lot of enjoyment—God's ordering all things in the world in their several times and seasons—the consequent certainty of a judgment—man's entire ignorance of God's work—and the fact that God has given commandments as a revelation of His will—are all noticed as they occur, and then laid aside until "the entire conclusion of the matter" is to be stated. In the course of his work he has come to speak of the vanity connected with wisdom. This leads him to cite various common proverbial sayings, "words of wise men" (xii. 11), as specimens of what wisdom is: all which are chosen with reference (direct or indirect) to the conclusion which he has in his mind, and have a bearing upon the end which he has in view, and still more upon the end contemplated by his Divine Inspirer. And having done this, he gathers up into two short verses the truths which had turned up before almost by the way, and in so doing shows by implication the inapplicability of the objections which had been previously raised, and grounded on wisdom's apparent vanity. Wisdom is not speculative, but practical; and its practice does not consist in following out maxims of ordinary prudence, but in fearing God and keeping His commandments.

However God's judgment may come, and whatever may be its time, this is the only way for man to make preparation against it.

The view here propounded has much in common with those expressed by Ginsburg (to whose valuable work the present translator is much indebted) and Mr. Plumptre in his article "Ecclesiastes," in Smith's "Dictionary of the Bible." Ginsburg describes the design of the Book as being "to gather together the desponding people of God from the various expediencies to which they have resorted, in consequence of the inexplicable difficulties and perplexities in the moral government of God, into the community of the Lord." And thus far Ginsburg's account is true. Koheleth does not, however, guide God's people out of their difficulties as having found the way out of them himself; rather is his work like the affording of help to a drowning man by a man who is also in the water, and whose swimming powers are only slightly superior to those of his fellow. He can but keep his fellow's head above water for a short time, in the hope that help may come from another quarter before that time is expired.

If then it be asked how the writer's design is to be accomplished, the answer will have to be, that it is to be accomplished indirectly. The sacred writer does not give a logical solution of any one difficulty; but he offers to God's perplexed and tempted saints the comfort and support of his own example and sympathy. And those of them who have faith may seek to approximate to him; and in so doing their faith will be strengthened, and they will be encouraged to persevere in God's ways steadfastly unto the end, when all difficulties will be cleared up, and we shall know even as we are known.

§ 3. Division of the Book.

The division of this book (as of the rest of the Old Testament) into *chapters* is traditionally ascribed to Archbishop Langton and to Cardinal Hugo, or Hugh de St. Cher. The division into

verses is that of the Masoretic editors, whose acquaintance with their own (the Hebrew) language must have been perfect. The arrangement of the text into *paragraphs* has been attempted by various commentators, and with various success. In the opinion of the present translator, it is impossible to divide the book into large sections; nor has he seen any such division as yet which can be fairly substantiated in all points. Ginsburg, valuable as his commentary is, seems to have failed herein as much as any one else. And the same must be said of the division into paragraphs adopted by Mendelssohn, and which has been almost entirely followed by Preston.

§ 4. Special Application for Christians in the Last Days.

That the Book has some such special application, is probable from several expressions which it contains. The mention of "time" in connection with *judgment* (see especially iii. 17),—and more particularly as we conclude from the context that the "time" spoken of in this Book is a *predestined* time, naturally leads us to think not only of those "times and seasons" generally whereof Scripture speaks in reference to the Lord's Second Coming (Acts i. 7, 1 Thess. v. 1), and all of which the Father hath reserved in His own power, but more especially of that day and that hour which the Father alone knows (Matt. xxiv. 36). To ch. ix. 12 reference may have been made by the Lord when He said, "As a snare shall it [His Day] come on all those that dwell on the face of the whole earth."* We can hardly err, however, in saying that in the day whereof the Lord speaks in those words of His, this passage of Ecclesiastes will have its chief fulfilment. And we notice that when the Sacred Writer is describing the evil time which comes upon all men in the ordinary course of nature, the language which we find him using recalls naturally that in which the approach of the Great Day is described by prophets, and by the Lord Himself.

* Luke xxi. 35.

Koheleth writes of the present time as being the time "while the sun and the light and the moon and the stars are not darkened."* And the Lord, in setting forth the signs of His near approach, has these words:—"Immediately after the tribulation of those days shall the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven."† While with the "fears in the way" (Eccles. xii. 5) we may compare the Lord's next words as reported by St. Luke, "Men's hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth."‡ The human race will then be in its old age.

It is, however, more important to notice that the circumstances described in this Book by the Sacred Writer will have their chief exemplification in the time of Antichrist, and the times immediately preceding. The writer speaks of himself as having acquired great stores of wisdom; and we know from Daniel that in the last times "knowledge shall be increased."§ Again: we know that in those times the Church, having become in her corruption the mystical Babylon, will be (as she is now to a certain extent) in league with the powers of the world: in consequence of which, she will receive of the world great riches and honour, and the furtherance of her schemes. This was revealed to St. John in the vision of the woman sitting upon the beast, lifted up upon it, supported by it, and guiding it.‖ And it may be mystically indicated by Koheleth's amassing to himself silver, gold, and other precious treasure (ii. 8). Similarly, by the houses, vineyards, gardens, and parks (*vv.* 4, 5) may be denoted the various sects, parties, and communities which have place in the company of the baptized. The "pools of water" (*v.* 6) may be perversions of those Divine ordinances by means of which the Great Husbandman willed to nourish and strengthen the vineyard of His planting. By the appointing of male and female singers (*v.* 8) may be denoted the setting up of

* Eccles. xii. 2. † Matt. xxiv. 29. ‡ Luke xxi. 26.
§ Dan. xii. 4. ‖ Rev. xvii.

a beautiful ritual and its accessories; done ostensibly, perhaps, "to the praise and glory of God," but in reality and truth for the gratification of those who are to take part in it or to be present at it. While by the "divers captive women" (*ib.*) may be meant Christian congregations which have fallen from their high calling, and which, instead of being virgin-companions of the Bride,* are captives kept to wait upon the Mother of Harlots: nay, actually parts and parcels of herself.

For it will be observed that Koheleth, in giving this description of his acquisitions, works, doings, and appointments, does not commend his course herein as one to be followed. He merely says that in former times he had done this and that. And certainly when God's elect are in a condition specially requiring the teaching and comfort of this Book, they will look back upon the past, and around them upon the circumstances then present, and will perceive that the general company of the baptized, whereof they are integral parts, has actually done as Koheleth mystically describes, and has brought itself into the position which he mystically contemplates: and they will feel, as he felt, that it is all vanity and striving after the wind.

And when the Church, now become Babylon, is thus in the full enjoyment of her worldly power, she will use that power for the persecution of those of her members who are faithful to their rightful Lord and Head. Thus it is that St. John "saw the woman drunk with the blood of the saints, and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus.†"

At such times the objections brought up against God's moral government, and mentioned in this Book, will be in great force. The corruption of God's church—hypocrisy and falsehood mixed with large profession—will have reached its height (cf. v. 1, &c.). The oppression of God's servants, typified by the oppression under Ahaz and Sennacherib, will be most terrible: the perversion of justice and judgment will be most systematic. (Cf. iii. 16, iv. 1, v. 8, also x. 6, 7.) No man will be able to trust

* Ps. xlv. 14. † Rev. xvii. 6.

his nearest relatives: if he breathes the slightest whisper to the disparagement of those in power, information will be laid against him by the very inmate of his bedchamber. (Cf. x. 20.) The introduction to this state of things will have been that slothfulness (x. 18) which leads to the decay of the spiritual house, and which the Lord so severely censures as lukewarmness, in Laodicea, the last of the seven churches.* In the time, too, when the Two Witnesses are prophesying and working miracles of judgment,† and yet more signally still when the Seven Last Plagues are being poured out, men will be tempted to forget that God is good and merciful, so awful will be the calamities with which He will then "punish the inhabitants of the earth."‡ And therefore it is that we read in Revelation, "Men blasphemed the name of God who hath power over these plagues . . . . and they gnawed their tongues for pain, and blasphemed the God of heaven because of their plagues and their sores."§ At such times the popular doctrine, and that which will be pressed home to people more and more, will be that there is one event to the righteous and to the wicked: that there is no God judging in the earth, or if there is a God at all, that His judgments are mere caprice: and this last blasphemy will probably receive some support from the mingling of God's faithful servants with the surrounding and wicked world in the experience of His four sore judgments. What awful commentaries will all this afford upon the text—"All is vanity!" The fashion of this world will be passing away:‖ the LORD will be making the earth empty, and making it waste, and turning it upside down, and scattering abroad the inhabitants thereof.¶

But the worst period of the desolations will be at the very last, when Antichrist, having overcome and slain the Two Witnesses,** will set himself up in all the awful height of his blasphemy; taking his seat in the temple of God, showing

* Rev. iii. 15, 16. † Rev. xi. 5, 6. ‡ Is. xxvi. 21. § Rev. xvi. 9, 10, 11.
‖ 1 Cor. vii. 31. ¶ Is. xxiv. 1. ** Rev. xi. 7.

himself that he is God,* and forbidding worship to be paid to any thing or Being save only himself. Then will he do after his manner what his great type, Antiochus Epiphanes, did after his, viz., take away the daily sacrifice.† Antichrist will forbid the Eucharistic Bread and Wine to be offered to God in memorial of the One Sacrifice of the Cross. He will forbid Christians to show forth their Lord's Death in the manner appointed by Him. He will also, doubtless, do after the manner of Antiochus in other respects also; seeking out copies of the Holy Scriptures with a view to destroying them,‡ and raging against Christian ministers of all orders and ranks, and putting a stop to the ministration of Christian ordinances generally. To this awful time there is probably a mystical reference in the words of our present book (xii. 6)—"While the silver cord is not loosed, or the golden bowl broken, or the pitcher broken at the fountain, or the wheel broken at the cistern." For *silver* and *gold* signify respectively, in the symbolic language of Scripture, *love* and *truth:* thus the loosening of the silver cord will mean the love of many waxing cold:§ and the breaking of the golden bowl will mean the failure of truth from the earth:‖ and we understand, then, that in the last awful time there will be no longer any speaking of the truth in love. And as the "wells of salvation" in Isaiah xii. 3 are the sacraments and other means of grace, so the breaking of the pitcher and the wheel may signify the cessation of those ministries by which the Sacraments and other means of grace are dispensed.

Under these circumstances God's faithful remnant will have to console themselves with the thought of the living and eternal God, whose judgment is so soon to be perfected: and be content to "fear God and keep His commandments," how illogical soever such practice may seem.

And until those days are upon us—"while as yet the sun,

* 2 Thess. ii. 4; Dan. xi. 36. † Dan. viii. 11, xi. 30; 1 Mac. i. 44, 45.
‡ 1 Mac. i. 56, 57. § Matt. xxiv. 12. ‖ Is. lix. 14, 15; 2 Thess. ii. 10, 11.

and the light, and the moon, and the stars, are not darkened"—the word to each member of the Church is, Remember thy Creator. Seek not *a religion about* God, seek *God Himself.* Study not to go through a round of ceremonies, for the pleasure of thinking what a good "Catholic" thou art—study not to divest thy religion of all ceremonies for the pleasure of thinking what a good Protestant thou art; but let thy heart go after the personal living God, in the path of reverence and obedience. Occupy thyself with works of charity: do diligently for Him the work which He may have given thee to do; and enjoy with thankfulness whatever may come to thee from His hand in the way of pleasure. "Let thy garments be always white:" not defiled with any pollution, whether fleshly or spiritual. "And let thy head lack no ointment:" set thyself to receive through the appointed ordinances, and to cherish by all means, that anointing of the Holy Ghost which sealeth thee unto the day of redemption. Seek not the destruction of Babylon by ecclesiastical or civil revolution, lest thou be hurt by the falling stones or bitten by the serpent: rather leave her judgment to God; for thyself, be in readiness to come out of her as soon as the command to that effect is given, and meanwhile to act upon Jeremiah's precept—"Seek the peace of the city whither I have caused you to be carried away captives, and pray unto the LORD for it, for in the peace thereof shall ye have peace."*

Or, as the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews puts it, "He hath promised, saying, Yet once more I shake not the earth only, but also heaven. And this word, 'yet once more,' signifieth the removing of those things that are shaken, as of things that are made, that those things which cannot be shaken may remain. Wherefore, we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear."†

* Jer. xxix. 7. † Heb. xii. 26-28.

KOHELETH, OR ECCLESIASTES.

[I. 1.] THE WORDS OF KOHELETH,[a] THE SON OF DAVID, KING IN JERUSALEM.

[2.] Most vain![b] said[c] Koheleth: most vain! all [is] vanity.

Everything, thought Koheleth, is in vain,

[3.] What advantage doth a man get in all his labour wherein he laboureth under the sun? [4.] [One] generation goeth, and [another] generation cometh, while the earth abideth for ever.[d] [5.] The sun also ariseth, and the sun setteth; and unto its place whereunto it panteth [to arrive], there it riseth. [6.] The wind goeth to the south and turneth to the north: the wind turneth about continually as it goeth, and the wind returneth upon its circuits. [7.] All

man has no real advantage in any of his labour. We see unsatisfied labour everywhere in the outer world: in human generations—in the sun—

in the wind—

in rivers—

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[a] The word *Koheleth*, although used as a proper name, is probably not really so, since it occurs with the article in xii. 8; and the occurrence of the article with proper names of places is no parallel. The word comes from a root meaning "to assemble," and which is always used, in the Bible, of assembling *persons*. Hence we infer that *Koheleth* does not mean (as some say) "compiler" of *sayings* or *truths*. Moreover, if it had that meaning, we should have found the verb in xii. 9; where, however, it does not occur at all. The best explanation is that it is symbolic, and that the writer means by it to put himself forward as the *gatherer* of God's people, "who (says Ginsburg) through inexplicable difficulties and perplexities in the moral government of God, loosened their ties, and were in danger of being totally detached from that community" whereof they were, in virtue of their circumcision, members.

[b] Literally, "vanity of vanities:" just as the *most holy* place in the tabernacle was called "the holy of holies." These are instances of one form of the Hebrew superlative.

[c] Not "saith." He *said* it in time past; but he has withal something better to say now. The fear of God and the keeping of His commandments (xii. 13) cannot be altogether vanity, though indeed this conclusion is left for the reader to draw for himself.

[d] The writer does not mean to make any assertion, one way or the other, as to the *absolute eternity* of the world: all he means is to assert that the world is unchanged, as compared with the generations which come and go upon its surface.

the torrents run into the sea, yet the sea is not full: unto the place whither the torrents run, thither they come back again.[e] [8.] All things [are] labouring [in a way which] a man cannot utter: an eye is not satisfied with seeing, neither an ear filled with hearing. [9.] That which hath been [is] that which will be: and that which hath been done [is] that which shall be done; and [there is] nothing new under the sun. [10.] [If] there is anything whereof one might say, "See, this is new"; it had already been in the ages which were before us. [11.] The former things have no memorial; and the latter things moreover which shall be, they, [I say,] shall have no memorial along with the [things] which shall be afterwards.

in the senses—

in human actions in general.

If anything seems new, it is only because former things whereof it is a repetition had left no memorial.

[12.] I Koheleth was[f] king over Israel in Jerusalem.[g] [13.] And I

So I Koheleth found it.

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[e] That the clouds, whence the rivers get their water, are formed from the sea by evaporation, is asserted in Job xxxvi. 27: "For He taketh away [sc. from the sea] the drops of water; they distil rain for His mist." Presently after, in *v.* 30, the drops which form the clouds are called *roots of the sea*, because of their origin.

[f] No argument can be deduced from this use of the past tense to the effect that the writer is assuming the character of a person who had ceased to be king at the time when the book was written. The past tense is continually used in Hebrew with reference to a state or condition into which the speaker came at some time past, and in which he still is; *e.g.* יְהֹוָה מָלָךְ (Ps. xciii. 1), "The LORD is king." In the present instance the meaning is, "I was king at the time whereof I am now speaking," without specifying whether or not he is king now. The "witnesses" whereof Ginsburg (p. 246) speaks are nothing more than so many people who understood the past tense in the other way. Tradition, as an exponent of language, is only of weight in so far as the earliest deliverers of it to us can be supposed to have more knowledge than ourselves: which is not the case here. Hebrew grammarians of the present day understand the force of the Hebrew tense, just as well as the authors of the Chaldee paraphrase, the *Midrash Yalkut*, the *Talmud*, and the *Midrash Maase Bishlomo Hammelech*, or Rashi. A parallel case is the interpretation of Ex. xix. 17, where the traditional explanation of ויתיצבו בתחתית ההר ("and they presented themselves at the nether part of the mount," or "at the foot of the mount") is, "they presented themselves *under* the mount" in the most literal sense, the mountain having been moved from its place and turned over them like a tub!

[g] No argument can be drawn from the words "in Jerusalem," as indicating that the Israelitish monarchy was, at the time when this book was written, divided into two, one in Jerusalem and the other in Samaria; unless it could be shown that there were within the writer's knowledge *no other mon-*

was wont to apply[h] my heart to enquire and to investigate with wisdom[i] concerning every thing which [was being] done[j] under the heaven: that [is, concerning] the evil business which God hath given[k] to the children of men to be busied therewith. [14.] I saw all the works which had been done under the sun, and lo! all [was] vanity and striving after wind.[l] [15.] [There was that] crooked [which] could not be made straight;[m] and [that] deficiency [which] could not be made up.

I observed all kinds of works,

and found crookedness which could not be straightened, and deficiency which could not be made up.

[16.] I spake with my heart, saying, "Behold, I am become great, and have made increase in wisdom beyond all which have been before me in Jerusalem, and my heart hath seen abundance of wisdom and knowledge." [17.] Therefore I applied my heart to know wisdom and the knowledge of madness and folly: [and] I came to know that this also [is] a striving after wind. [18.] For with much wisdom there cometh much vexation; and he [that] increaseth knowledge increaseth heaviness.

Vain was the study of wisdom, madness, and folly:

[II. 1.] I said in my heart, "Come now, I will prove thee[n] with mirth; therefore enjoy pleasure:" and lo, this also [was] vanity. [2.] I said of

likewise the experience of mirth and pleasure,

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archies at all. Jerusalem might just as well be mentioned in contrast with Damascus, Petra, Rabbath-moab, &c., as with Samaria.

[h] Future tense, being converted by the ו; the sense being frequentative. Or the aoristic sense may be retained, owing to the past tense הייתי having occurred just before.

[i] Or, "philosophically."

[j] The word נעשה may be either the past tense third person singular masculine, or else the participle. Probably the latter, as we have the participle נעשים in iv. i.

[k] That labour is *God's appointment* is one of the things which the writer takes for granted, and on which he tacitly builds his conclusion.

[l] Ginsburg establishes this rendering (which has some support from the LXX. also) by a comparison of Hos. xii. 2 (1, E.V.), "Ephraim *striveth after* the wind," &c., where רעה רוח is parallel to קדים רדף.—Cf. also below, ch. v. 15.

[m] Literally, "[which one] could not make straight." The future is used (as so often) to denote frequency of habit, irrespectively of time, whether future, present, or even past.

[n] *i.e.* The heart or mind itself. The words just before, "I said in my heart" (not "*to* my heart," as Gins-

laughter, "[It is] mad:" and of mirth, "What doth this effect?"

and the attempt to combine intellectual pleasure with sensual.

[3.] I sought in my heart to cherish my body[o] with wine, my mind at the same time making progress in wisdom; and to take hold of folly, until that I should see where [was] good[p] for the children of men, which they might do under the heaven during the number of days which they might live. [4.] I made me great works: I builded me houses, I planted me vineyards. [5.] I made me gardens and parks, and planted in them all [manner of] fruit trees. [6.] I made me pools of water, to water therefrom a forest growing with trees. [7.] I bought male and female slaves, and had household children.[q] I had also cattle, abundance of kine and sheep, above all them which had been before me in Jerusalem. [8.] I amassed for myself silver also and gold, and such precious treasure as kings have, and cometh of the provinces:[r] I appointed me also male and female singers, and [those] delights of the sons of men, divers captive women.[s] [9.] So I was great, and made increase above anyone who had been before me in Jerusalem: moreover my wisdom[t] remained with me. [10.] And whatsoever mine eyes desired I

All the great works which I completed, and the acquisitions which I made, pointed me to the like conclusion.

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burg, which the Hebrew will not bear) are no argument against this. As the heart or mind is not a distinct person from the man whose heart or mind it is, such expressions as that before us are necessarily loose.

[o] Literally, "flesh."

[p] He *had* been searching for the true good; but the discussion of the question where it was to be found is not the object which he now has in writing this book, though allusion is made to it here. See Introduction, § 2.

[q] *i.e.* Children born to some of my slaves.

[r] Literally, "precious treasures of kings and the provinces."

[s] The word comes from a verb signifying *to spoil* or *carry captive*. The rendering in the text (and which is that of Aben Ezra, Mendelssohn, Heinemann, Preston, G.V., &c., though these do not all accept the etymology here propounded) is supported by the fact that the word for "delights" has reference to *amorous* delights chiefly. (Gesenius, Ginsburg.)

[t] Mentioned above, i. 16.

kept not from them: I withheld not my heart from any gladness, but [caused] my heart [to be] glad of all my labour: and[u] this[v] was my portion [which I had] from all my labour. [11.] I directed my view, however, [even] I myself, to all my works which my hands had wrought, and to the labour which I had laboured to effect: and lo! all [was] vanity and striving after wind, and [there was] no advantage [gotten] under the sun.

I had, and made the most of, my portion, viz. cheerfulness: but that was all:

there was no real advantage gained.

[12.] And [when] I directed my view moreover towards the beholding of wisdom and madness and folly; [saying,] "For what doeth that man who cometh after the king? even that which hath been done[w] already!" [13.] and [when] I saw that wisdom hath an advantage above folly, like [the advantage of] light above darkness; [as it is said,][x] [14.] "The wise man [hath] his eyes[y] in his head, but the fool walketh in darkness"; then I myself knew that one event happeneth unto all. [15.] And I said in my heart, "As it happeneth to the fool, so it happeneth unto me: and why in that case am I more wise [than he]?" And I said in my heart that this also [was] vanity. [16.] For the wise man hath no memorial any more than the fool, for ever; seeing that [in] the days which are coming[z] everything is forgotten: and how like unto the fool's [death] is the death of the wise man! [17.] Therefore I came to hate life: for

There was certainly some apparent advantage in wisdom over folly:

but there was also the consideration that all die alike,

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[u] Or, "seeing that."

[v] *i.e.* cheerfulness.

[w] Literally, "which [men] have done."

[x] This is one of those proverbial sayings whereof we shall have so many more instances. It is in a poetical form. The writer cites these proverbs as axiomatic: expressions of truths to be taken for granted.

[y] Or, as we should say, "hath eyes," the fool having not *some eyes elsewhere*, but (practically) *no eyes at all*.

[z] *i.e.* the days of death; which might, for aught that the writer knew (so far as appears in this book), never come to an end in a resurrection.

the work which had been done under the sun [was] evil to me: for all [was] vanity and striving after wind. [18.] And I hated, [even] I myself, all my own toil which I had taken under the sun, considering that I should have to leave it to a man who would be after me. [19.] And who knew whether he would be a wise man or a fool? yet he would have rule over all the toil which I had toiled out, and in which I had shown myself wise under the sun: this also [was] vanity.

and that the results of my work must be left at my death to another:

who might be a fool,

[20.] And I turned round to make my heart despair over all the toil which I had toiled out under the sun. [21.] For there is a man whose toil is with wisdom and with knowledge and with right,[a] yet to a man who hath not toiled therein[b] he will give it for his portion. This also [was] vanity, and a great evil. [22.] For what doth a man have[c] in all his toil, and in his heart's striving,[d] which he hath toiled out under the sun? [23.] for all his days [are] griefs, and his business [is] vexation, yea, his mind resteth not even in the night: this also [I say] was vanity.

and who certainly had not shared my labours.

[24.] There is nothing better for a man [than] that he should eat and drink and cause his soul to see good in his labour. (This also I myself saw, that it [is] from the hand of God, [25.] for[e] who could eat or enjoy pleasure, if not myself? [26.] for [it was] to the

Enjoyment of life then is best:

and it is God's appointment, as I saw:

my idea being that God

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[a] The Hebrew word signifies the right adaptation of means to an end; and so, that success which properly results from right means rightly used.

[b] *i.e.* in the *toil:* not in the wisdom, &c.

[c] Present participle: implying *present possession.* The writer here states the ground of the general principle just enounced. In such a case as he here contemplates, man has nothing at all: cheerfulness he might have had as his portion, but he puts cheerfulness away from him (*v.* 23).

[d] The Hebrew word is akin to the word rendered "striving after" in i. 14, &c.

[e] This "for" introduces an explanation of what he had just said, "I myself saw."

man who was good before Him[f] [that] He gave wisdom and knowledge and cheerfulness, and [it was] to the sinner [that] He gave business to gather together and to heap up, that he might give it under him who is good before God.) This also [was] vanity and striving after wind. [III. 1.] To every thing [there is] a season; and to every matter under the heaven [there is] a time. [2.] [There is] a time for[g] being born, and a time for dying: a time for planting, and a time for plucking a plant up: [3.] A time for slaying, and a time for healing; a time for breaking down, and a time for building up; [4.] a time for weeping, and a time for laughing; a time for mourning, and a time for dancing: [5.] a time for casting stones away, and a time for gathering stones together: a time for embracing, and a time for abstaining from embracing: [6.] a time for seeking, and a time for destroying: a time for keeping, and a time for casting away: [7.] a time for rending, and a time for sewing together: a time for keeping silence, and a time for speaking: [8.] a time for loving, and a time for hating: a time of war, and a time of peace. [9.] What advantage[h] hath the doer [of a thing] in that wherein he [is] toiling? [10.] I saw the business[i]

gives wisdom and cheerfulness to the righteous man, and to the wicked man toil and care, whereof the righteous is to enjoy the result.

But it was not so: everything is fore-ordained to its own time;

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[f] The writer does not lay any stress upon the *characters* of the men respectively: his point here is merely that God gives to one man wisdom and to another man care and toil. He had indeed assumed in his own mind (what subsequent observation led him afterwards to retract) that the one party was righteous, and the other wicked; and he mentions this assumption here by the way, but no more.

[g] "For" seems to express the sense of the original better than "to": since the reference is not to men's duties, but to God's predestination. The assumption that there is such a predestination is stated more distinctly in vi. 10.

[h] The writer here reasserts the same truth which he had asserted in i. 3, only putting it now on a different ground: the ground now being the assumption that God has predestinated everything.

[i] *i.e.* All the actions specified in the preceding verses, and each of which has its "*time*."

which God gave to the children of men to be busied therein. [11.] He hath made the whole, [everything] in its time beautiful; yet hath He put the world in their hearts,[j] to the end that man may not find out from the beginning to the end the work which God hath done.

and yet God gave man a will free with respect to all the universe;

so that God's works are altogether inscrutable: and this character of them was a part of His plan.

[12.] I know that there is nothing good for them, save that [every man] should do [what is] pleasant[k] during his life cheerfully: [13.] and every man [especially] who eateth and drinketh and experienceth good in all his toil, this [being] the gift of God. [14.] I know that whatever God doeth shall be for ever; [there is] no adding thereunto, and [there is] no diminishing therefrom: and God worketh[l] that men may fear before Him. [15.] That which shall be is now; and that which is to be hath already been: and God recalleth[m] that which is passed away.

Of four things there is no doubt:—

(1.) The desirableness of cheerful enjoyment.

(2.) The eternity and immutability of God's work.

(3.) The object of God's work, that men may fear him.

(4.) Present character of the past with God.

[16.] And furthermore, I saw, under the sun, the place of judgment, [that] wickedness [was] there; and the place of righteousness, [that] wickedness [was] there. [17.] I said in my heart, God must judge the righteous man and the wicked man; for for every matter and

And however the sight of wickedness in the place of authority might suggest the idea of a future judgment by God,

[j] He has filled their minds with thoughts about the whole world; one seeking one thing and another seeking another, so that when the cases of their several businesses are taken into account together, it is seen that they divide the world amongst them. He has given to each an independent will and reason, to be exercised upon some part or other of the world. And the apparent inconsistency which He has thus set on foot between His own divine sovereignty on the one hand and man's freedom of thought and will on the other, hinder men from finding out God's work.

[k] The parallel passages, ch. ii. 24, iii. 22, v. 17, viii. 15, make it probable that the translation in the text is correct.

[l] So F.V.

[m] This involves the idea of a *judgment*, to be brought out more distinctly hereafter. Hence follow naturally the thoughts of the judgment and justice which are administered by man.

with respect to every work [which is done] there,[n] [there is] an [appointed] time.

[18.] I said in my heart with regard to the saying of the children of men concerning God's manifesting them,[o] [I said,] to wit, that I could see that they were themselves but beasts:[p] [19.] since [there was] an event for the children of men, and likewise for the beasts: [there is,] I say, for them [but] one event: as [is] the death of one, so [is] the death of another; and one spirit[q] [is] for all, and man hath no advantage at all above beasts. [20.] All go unto one place:[r] all [were] of the dust, and to the dust all return. [21.] Who [is there that] knoweth a spirit of the children of men that goeth upward and a spirit of beasts which goeth downward to the earth?[s] [22.] Thus I saw that [there is] nothing better than for a man to be cheerful in his works; for that is his portion; for who can bring him to see what shall be after him?[t]

and however men may boast of their superiority to the brutes,

yet death cometh to men and to beasts alike:

[IV. 1.] And I saw, again, all the oppressions which [were] being done under the sun: and lo! [there were] the tears of them that were being oppressed and [that] had no comforter; and on the side of their oppressors

Yes! life itself is vain: for while many of the living suffer oppression without alleviation,

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[n] Some commentators lay a stress upon "there," and understand the writer to be referring to the place or circumstances of the *divine* judgment. This, however, cannot be, because the Hebrew word for "there" is not in the emphatic place of the sentence, and we understand therefore the reference to be similar to the reference of the word "there" (שם) in the verse before, *i.e.* to the place of *earthly* judgment.

[o] It seems best to consider the word לברם as an anomalous infinitive with ל prefixed and the suffix ם, the strict form being לְבָרָם, from the root ברר. Gesenius cites the form שָׁקָּ from שכך.

[p] להם is here pleonastic, like "to them" in such common English phrases as "be hanged to them."

[q] *i.e.* One *kind* of spirit, as "all fruit-trees" (ii. 5) means "all *kinds* of fruit-trees."

[r] The "place" is *the earth*, as explained in the rest of the verse.

[s] *i.e.* Who can point to any apparent difference between the death of a man and the death of a beast? So Vulg. G.V.

[t] The argument here is the same as in Job xxi. 19—21: "He should requite [the man] himself, that he may know [it]," &c.

[there was] power; but they had no comforter. [2.] And I commended the dead, those who are now dead, more than the living, those who are still alive. [3.] Yea, better than both of those [parties is] he who hath never yet been, who hath not seen the evil work which is being wrought under the sun.

all the dead are at rest.

[4.] And I saw all the toil and all right accomplishment of work, that it [caused][u] the envying of a man by his neighbour. This also [is] vanity and striving after wind. [5.] "The fool [is] folding his hands together, and eating his own flesh."[v] [6.] [But on the other hand,] "Better [is] a handful of quiet, than both hands full of toil, and striving after wind."[w]

And moreover even those who use life successfully may be envied by some,

and pitied or despised by others (fools);

[7.] And I again saw vanity under the sun: [8.] there is a single one, and no second [with him], yea, he hath no son nor relation: yet [there is] no end to all his toil, his eye also will not be satisfied with riches; [neither will he say,] "and for whom [am] I toiling and stinting myself of good?" This also [is] vanity, and [it is] an evil business. [9.] Two [are] better than one, because they will have a good reward for their toil. [10.] For if they fall, the one[x] will raise up his fellow: but woe to the single one that falleth, who hath not another to help him up! [11.] Moreover, if two lie together, they have warmth: but as for a single one, how can he be warm? [12.] And if

and some, while labouring hard, have no relation to whom they may leave their gains.

What advantages then should be brought by marriage!

[u] Literally "was." The Hebrews regarded the effect as being in certain aspects one and the same with the cause. Cf. vii. 25, 26.

[v] This proverbial saying is put as the sentiment and the man who has been toiling so hard and so successfully as to incur the envy of all his neighbours. He thinks that those who are idle are mere fools, and by living on their capital instead of on the wealth which they might acquire by using the capital rightly and diligently, do really eat their own flesh.

[w] This proverbial saying is put as expressing what the fool might say for himself by way of excuse.

[x] הָאֶחָד, one of *the* two.

[a man] prevail against him, [to wit,] against the single one, the two can withstand him: and a threefold cord[y] will not be quickly unravelled.[z]

especially when it is blessed with offspring.

[13.] "Better [is] a poor and wise child than an old and foolish king, who knoweth no more how to take advice:[a] [14.] for out of prison [one] hath come to be a king;[b] whereas [a man] hath been born poor even in his own kingdom." [15.] [Thus] did I see all the living[c] which walk under the sun [taking part][d] with the youth next [in succession], who is to rise up in his place:[e] [16.] any one who goeth before all the people[f] hath no end of them:[g] those however who come after will not rejoice in him.[h] Surely this also [is] vanity, and striving after wind.

Yet even here there is vanity: a child may be more popular than his father, and lose his popularity in his turn.

[V. 1.] [We hear it said,][i] "keep thy foot when thou goest to the house of God; and instead of offering sacrifice as fools[j] who know not that they do evil, draw near [to God] for the purpose of obeying. [2.] Be not rash with thy mouth, and let not thy heart be hasty in uttering

The maxims of religion testify indeed to the truth that there is a Being supreme above all, and to be feared; but how much vanity and folly are here also!

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[y] The union of man and wife was a twofold cord: the birth of a child makes the cord threefold.

[z] Or, "loosened."

[a] *i.e.* Who shuts himself up in his palace and does not let even his counsellors get at him.

[b] So Vulg. and F.V. The reference is no doubt to Joseph.

[c] *i.e.* The present generation.

[d] So F.V., Mendelssohn, and Preston.

[e] *i.e.* In place of the old king.

[f] *i.e.* Who makes himself a demagogue.

[g] The ל in לכל־העם is the mark of the genitive. The substantive by which לכל־העם is governed is קץ; which therefore is as though it were in the state of construction. The meaning is, that a demagogue has an infinite number of people following at his heels.

[h] *i.e.* Just as the present generation are discontented with their present king, so the rising generation will be similarly affected towards the successor who is now so much desired.

[i] The passage which thus commences must be considered as being either an admonition addressed by the writer directly to each of his readers, or else a citation, made by him for the purposes of his present work, of maxims current in his day among professedly religious people. The latter alternative is preferable; since, when understood in accordance with it, the passage fits into the context very well, which on the other supposition the abruptness of its commencement cannot (as it seems) be explained at all.

[j] Literally, "instead of fools offering sacrifice."

a word before God, for God [is] in heaven, and thou upon earth: therefore let thy words be few. [3.] For [as] a dream cometh with a multitude of business,[k] so the voice of a fool cometh with a multitude of words. [4.] When thou vowest a vow unto God, defer not to pay it; for [there is] no good purpose in fools:[l] pay that which thou hast vowed. [5.] Better [is it] that thou shouldest not vow, than that thou shouldest vow and not pay. [6.] Suffer not thy mouth to cause thy [whole body][m] to sin; neither say thou before the angel[n] that it [was] an error: wherefore should God be angry at thy voice, and destroy the work of thy hands?" [7.] Surely with [all the] multitude of dreams and vanities, and the abundance of words, [which there are,] surely [I say] thou must fear God.[o]

[8.] [We hear it said, again,] "If thou seest oppression of a poor man, and violent perverting of judgment and justice in the provinces,[p] There is too, a general acknowledgment of vanity in human government.

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[k] *i.e.* A dream brings with it, is attended with, or makes its appearance under, a confused multitude of objects. This is one of the explanations proposed by Ginsburg; and seems to suit best with the other side of the comparison.

[l] By this the hint is conveyed, "If thou actest like fools, it is because there is no good purpose in thee." The authorized version is admissible, "[He hath] no pleasure in fools;" but it seems more likely that if that were what the writer meant to say, he would have expressed the word לוֹ (= "He hath") after אֵין, instead of leaving it to be understood.

[m] For this meaning of בשר, cf. ii. 3.

[n] Some angel who is present in the assemblies of God's people. Cf. 1 Corinthians xi. 10, where the reference is the same. The singular may be for the plural; but if it is to be pressed, the angel presiding over the altar (cf. Rev. xiv. 18) may be here intended. This is Ginsburg's explanation: he well remarks in support of it that if a *human* messenger or priest had been meant, we should undoubtedly have had "do not say to the messenger," and not "before," "in the presence of:" in regard to which distinction he compares a similar distinction in Deut. xxvi. 3 and 5.

[o] *i.e.* However people may behave foolisly, the acknowledged duties of religion remain duties still.—It will be noticed how, in the ideas of God's anger, and the possibility of His destroying the work of the man's hands, there is involved that same idea of judgment which is hereafter to be conclusively brought out.

[p] Literally, "the province," for "provinces" generally: singular for plural. Or it may mean, "the province wherein thou dwellest."

marvel not at the matter, seeing that one high personage hath another high personage above him in office, and [there are] higher ones above them.[q] [9.] Moreover, the advantage which a land hath consisteth in the whole:[r] the owner[s] of a [single] field hath servants [under him].[t] [10.] [On the other hand,] "One that loveth silver will not be satisfied with silver; and every one that loveth abundance shall be destitute of increase."[u] All this[v] [is] vanity: [11.] [for] when riches are multiplied, they are multiplied that eat them: and what success [is there] to the owner, save the beholding [this] with his eyes? [12.] The sleep of a labouring man [is] sweet, whether he eat little or much: but the abundance [which] a rich man hath doth not suffer him to sleep.[w] [13.] There is a sore evil which I have seen under the sun, [namely] riches kept for the owner thereof to his own hurt, [14.] and those riches were perishing with evil business,[x] and [when] he used to beget a son, then there was nothing in his hand; [15.] as he[y] came forth from his

And there is vanity, not only in administration, but in wealth: for enjoyment and wealth are not proportionate to one another.

Nay, sometimes, wealth brings both discomfort

and positive harm,

both to the owner, and to his children.

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[q] This is substantially Preston's rendering, in which he follows Mendelssohn and Vulg. The argument is, The gradation of power opens a door to abuse in administration; and there is gradation of power even in the smallest spheres.

[r] *i.e.* You must not take the several institutions of a country piecemeal, and pass a condemnation because some one or other may be imperfect by itself; but you must rather look at the whole in the lump.

[s] For this sense of מֶלֶךְ, cf. 2 Sam. xxiv. 23, "All these things did Araunah, the owner, give unto the king." For the use of לְ cf. מֶלֶךְ לְמוֹאָב, Num. xxii. 4.

[t] Literally "[is] being served."

[u] This rendering seems to square best with the accentuation. "Destitute" means destitute so far as the man's desires are concerned: he is no nearer to being satisfied than if he had no increase (interest coming in from the money which he had lent) at all. Or it may mean, that he will have absolutely no increase, because he prefers hoarding his money to making use of it.

[v] *i.e.* The *love* of silver and abundance.

[w] And therefore the remedy against vanity is not to be sought in mere abstinence from labour.

[x] Perhaps through rust and tarnish. Cf. James v. 3.

[y] *i.e.* The father; for (1) we could hardly speak of a newly-born infant as having or having not wealth *in*

mother's womb, naked he would have to go back again as he came, and with all his toil he would have to carry away nothing which he might take in his hand. [16.] And this also was a sore evil, [that] in all points as he came so should he go: and what advantage [would there be] to him, seeing that he was wont to labour for the wind? [17.] All his days also he was wont to eat in darkness,[a] and [there was] much vexation, and [there was] his disease, and [there was] anger.[a]

[18.] Behold what I saw: [it is] good, that is, comely, to eat and to drink and to experience good in all one's toil which one may toil out under the sun, [during] the number of days which one may live, which God may have given one; since that is one's portion: [19.] Every man also, [especially] to whom God hath given riches and wealth, and hath given power to eat thereof, and to take his portion and to be cheerful in his work: this [being] the gift of God. [20.] [It is good, I say] that when God causeth [him] to work[b] for the sake of cheerfulness in his heart,[c] he should remember the days of his life, that they are not many.

Cheerful enjoyment therefore is best, especially when we remember (as we ought to do) the shortness of life:

but what vanity is implied in this last point!

[VI. 1.] There is an evil which I have seen under the sun, and it was great upon[d] men,—[2.] [the case of] a man to whom God hath given riches, and wealth, and honour, so that nothing is lacking to him of all which his soul

And it must be owned moreover, that even this cheerfulness cannot always be had; since God sometimes gives riches to one man,

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hand; and (2) the expression "his toil" below can only apply to the father's toil, as only the father's toil had been mentioned.

[a] *i.e.* To take even his meals in gloom: to be sullen and morose even at times when cheerfulness should have been most natural and appropriate.

[a] *i.e.* He used to make himself ill and out of temper.

[b] The verb עִנָּה in Kal means sometimes (i. 13, iii. 10) *to work:* and hence in Hiphil it would mean (as here) *to cause to work.* So Ginsburg.

[c] Literally "the cheerfulness of his heart."

[d] Had the writer meant "among," he would probably have used the preposition בְּ rather than עַל.

is wont to desire, but God would not give him power to eat thereof, but a stranger[e] should eat it. This was vanity and an evil disease.[f] [3.] If a man were to beget an hundred children, and live many years, so that the days of his years should be many, but his soul were not satisfied with good, so that he were not to have even a grave; I said that an untimely birth is better than he: [4.] for it came with vanity, and departed in darkness, and its name is hidden in darkness. [5.] Moreover it had not seen the sun, or known anything: this hath rest rather than the other. [6.] And even though [a man] had lived a thousand years twice [told], but had experienced no good; [is] not every one going unto one [and the same] place?[g] [7.] All the toil of man is for his mouth; and yet the appetite is not satisfied. [8.] Surely what advantage [herein] hath the wise man more than the fool?

What [advantage] hath[h] the intelligent poor man through [the] wandering[i] [of his desire] against[j] life?[k] [9.] Better [in such a case is] the sight of the eyes than the wandering of the desire. This also [is] vanity and striving after wind. [10.] Whatever he was, his name had been already pronounced; and it was known that he was man, and unable to contend

but the enjoyment thereof to another.

Now in such cases the owner is not as well off as an abortion:

and the evil in question is common to the wise and the foolish.

Others again have no wealth at all, but a craving which their poverty can never satisfy.

And even such an one and his circumstances had been subjects of the Divine fore-appointment!

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[e] *i.e.* one of a different family. Cf. Ps. lxix. 9 (Heb.).

[f] The meaning of חלי רע is probably the same as that of רעה חולה.

[g] As much as to say, even thus the case is not altered in any essential point.

[h] Or, "what, [I say,] hath the intelligent *poor* man . . . ?"

[i] The same word occurs presently after, and must therefore have the same meaning in both places.

[j] The idea of antagonism (which is implied in the Hebrew word here, cf. iv. 12, Dan. x. 13, Neh. iii. 37, Ps. xxiii. 5) occurs again at the end of *v.* 10. The *wandering of a desire against life* means a seeking in various ways to conquer adverse circumstances, *e.g.* to conquer cold by means of warm clothing; to conquer hunger by means of solid and substantial food.

[k] So LXX.

with [the] One Who was mightier than himself.

[11.] Seeing then that there are [so] many circumstances which multiply vanities, what advantage hath man? [12.] for who knoweth what is good for a man in life, [during] the number of the days of his vain life which he spendeth as a shadow? for who can tell a man what will be after him under the sun? [VII. 1.] [On this reasoning,] "Fame [is] better than precious ointment; and [thus] the day of death [better] than the day of one's birth:" [2.] "[it is] better to go to the house of mourning than to go to the house of feasting; seeing that that [is] the end of all men; and he that liveth may lay [it] to his heart:" [3.] "Sorrow [is] better than laughter, for while the countenance is sad the heart may be cheerful."[1] [4.] "The heart of the wise [is] in the house of mourning, but the heart of fools [is] in the house of mirth." [5.] "[It is] better to hear the reproof of the wise, than for a man to hear the song of fools: [6.] For as the noise of thorns under a pot,[m] so is the laughter of the fool." This also is vanity: [7.] for the practice of oppression will derange a wise man; and a gift will undo the intellect.[n] [8.] [We hear it said, again,] "Better [is] the end of a thing than its beginning: better [is] the patient in spirit than the proud in spirit." [9.] "Be not hasty in thy spirit to feel vexation; for vexation resteth in the bosom of fools."

So much vanity is there in the world,

that we are actually referred to *posterity* for our happiness! we are to have our best portion *after we are dead!*

wisdom actually prefers mourning to feasting!

There is vanity among the wise:

And however men may refer us to the end rather than the beginning, and appeal to maxims against hastiness and discontent;

[1] This is the meaning of the Hebrew phrase. Cf. Ruth iii. 7; also 1 Sam. xxv. 36.

[m] Making a great blaze and noise for a few moments, but soon going entirely out, and leaving hardly any hot embers to keep the contents of the pot warm.

[n] Even a wise man may sometimes allow himself in practices which make him for a time a fool.

[10.] [That is,] Say not, "What cause hath happened why the former days were better than these?" for thou wilt not have asked touching this wisely.

and however men may extol wisdom

[11.] [And if it be said on the one hand,] that wisdom is good, equally [so] with[o] an inheritance: yea, even more so[p] for those who see the sun: [12.] for that [however true that proverb may be] "within the shelter of money, within the shelter of wisdom;"[q] there is an advantage in knowing[r] that wisdom giveth life to them that have it;—[13.] [it may be replied on the other hand,] Behold the work of God, that—who can make straight what He made crooked? [14.] In the day of prosperity enjoy [it], and in the day of adversity behold [as I said]:[s] God appointed the one against the other, to the end that man may not find out anything after that He [hath been working].[t]

for its life-giving properties,

all which a man can do is, when in prosperity, to enjoy it, and when in adversity to consider that God's work is all inscrutable!

[15.] With all [which] I saw in my own vain days, there was a righteous man [whom I saw] perishing in his righteousness, and there was a wicked man [whom I saw] prolonging [his life] in his wickedness. [16.] [And it may be said,] "Be not righteous overmuch; neither make thyself overwise: wherefore wilt thou destroy thyself?"

Moreover, the case has even been seen of one man perishing in the midst of a life of righteousness, and another man prolonging a life of wickedness.

[17.] [It may indeed be replied,] Be not overmuch wicked, neither be thou foolish: wherefore shouldest thou die before thy time?[u] [18.] If it is good that thou shouldest take hold of the one [principle], then also from the other withdraw not thine hand: for he that

And as for the remarks commonly made in reference hereto,

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[o] For this use of בְּ, cf. Ps. lxxiii. 25.

[p] So Vulg.

[q] *i.e.* He who has pecuniary resources will find them generally available for the same ends to which are available the resources of wisdom. The proverb is evidently one of the worldly wise, cited by the inspired writer as containing a certain amount of truth, but not endorsed by him as true in all respects.

[r] *sc.* By experience.

[s] *i.e.* Behold the work of God.

[t] Literally, "after Him."

[u] *sc.* By the divine judgment.

feareth God[v] will escape both of them. [19.] Wisdom maketh the wise man stronger than ten rulers who are in the city: [20.] though there is not a just man upon the earth who doeth good without some sin.[w] [21.] Nevertheless give not thy attention to any [mere] words which may be spoken;[x] lest thou hear thy servant speaking of thee lightly:[y] [22.] for oftentimes thy heart hath known that thou thyself also hast spoken lightly of others." [23.] All this [however] I have tried by wisdom: I said, I will be wise; but it [was] far from me. [24.] That which hath been [was] distant, and exceeding deep: who could find it out?

they seem inadequate as explanations: all I can say is that my utmost endeavours to fathom the mystery have failed.

[25.] I turned again, and my heart, to know and to seek out and to search [into] wisdom and sophisms,[z] to wit, that I might know [the cause of] the wickedness of folly,[a] and the folly [which is] madness. [26.] And I find woman[b] to be [a cause] more bitter than death: seeing that her heart [is made up of] snares and knives, and her hands [are] bands:[c] One who is good before God may be delivered from

In searching out the causes of wickedness and folly, I found woman to be one of the worst.

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[v] *sc.* As thou professest to do.

[w] The force of the argument is, "And thus even if a righteous man does ever perish in his righteousness, such perishing must needs be only exceptional."

[x] As much as to say, Although there is so much sin in the world that even righteous men are not entirely free therefrom, yet do not, by giving heed to mere words, be cognisant of more sin than you can help.

[y] Or, "cursing." Similarly in the next verse.

[z] The present translator has not been able to find any word which exactly expresses the force of the Hebrew here. He has used the word "sophism," because the Greek *σόφισμα* expresses the Hebrew with tolerable exactness. Besides the present context (*vv.* 27, 28, 29), also ix. 10, where it may mean "contrivance;" the word חשבון occurs in the Bible only in 2 Chr. xxvi. 15, where it may be rendered "contrivances," and is used as a designation of engines "for casting arrows and great stones." Here it seems to mean *any curious result of philosophical reasoning*, any truth skilfully demonstrated, or the argument whereby a demonstration is made out. The singular number is put for the plural: as in *v.* 27.

[a] Or, "of the loins," *i.e.* sensuality. Cf. Ps. xxxviii. 8 (Heb.).

[b] האשה, "woman" generally, as האדם is "mankind generally."

[c] Literally "bound," *i.e.* not in the sense of having cords bound round them, but in that of being themselves bound round the sinner who has been captivated.

her, but a sinner will be caught by her.[d]
[27.] Lo! this [I say] have I found,
said Koheleth,[e] [making account of
things] one by one, for the finding out
sophisms:[f] [28.] that which my soul
hath long[g] sought, and I have not
found. One human being out of a
thousand I did find, but among all
those I did not find a woman.[h] [29.]
But, behold! this [was all which] I
found: although God made man up-
right, and [although] they have en-
quired into many sophisms, [saying,]
[VIII. 1.][i] "Who [is] like the wise
man?
and who knoweth the in-
terpretation of a thing,

And this was all I could discover, in spite of

all the admiration which people express for the wise.

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[d] In order to estimate aright the force of the sweeping charge which the writer here brings against womankind in general, it must be remembered (1) that, viewed in reference to woman as represented by Eve, it is literally true: "Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived was in the transgression" (1 Tim. ii. 14), and that transgression was the proximate cause of absolutely all the wickedness which has been in the world since: (2) That although in ancient times the position of woman was probably higher amongst the Jews than amongst other eastern nations, yet she was considered even by them more as a mere breeder than as a general help to man; and this low view of woman's functions would be more especially apt to exclude all other views in the harem of an eastern king: (3) That when this book was written, the sin of the first Eve had not been remedied (as it has now) through the obedient faith of the second Eve, whom all generations are to call blessed; and that all the childbearing which was then so earnestly desired had not issued (as it has now, 1 Tim. ii. 15) in the obtaining of salvation for woman and man alike, through the bringing into the world of God *in man's nature*—the Eternal Son born of a woman. (4) That consequently it cannot affect the excellence of the position of those who are *man and wife in the Lord*, or the preliminaries which may lead thereto.

[e] Preston's rendering, "compilation taught it me" cannot be accepted, for (1) we cannot suppose that the writer would have used such an expression as "said compilation" (which would be, on his view, the literal rendering of the Hebrew; (2) if the writer had, the verb must have been put in the masculine gender, "compilation" being *personified*. We therefore render, "said Koheleth": the verb being for once attracted into the feminine form by the feminine termination of the word *Koheleth*, which thus for once led the writer into a slip of the pen, *Koheleth* being merely a symbolical name. It is much as if the late authoress Charlotte Brontë should, when writing under her assumed name "Currer Bell," have spoken of herself for once in the *masculine* gender.

[f] Literally, "a sophism": singular for plural: as in *v.* 25.

[g] For this sense of עוֹד, cf. Gen. xlvi. 29, Ps. lxxxiv. 5 (Heb.).

[h] Not that there was absolutely no woman at all, such as he has desired to find, but merely not one in a thousand.

[i] The four lines here following are in a poetical shape.

[That] the wisdom of [such] a man may illumine his countenance, and [that] the boldness of his countenance may be renewed?"

[2.] Listen, then![j] keep the word[k] of a king, and exalt[l] the word of the oath of a ruler.[m] [3.] Go not hastily out of his sight;[n] stand not up because of a [mere] word [which is] evil; for whatsoever pleaseth him he can do. [4.] Where the word of a king is, [there is] power: and who can say unto him "what doest thou?" [5.] One that keepeth a commandment will not know an evil word: and a wise man's heart will know time and judgment, [6.] [to wit,] that for every [business] there is a time and a judgment, although the calamities of a man be great upon him,[o] [7.] for he knoweth not what shall be; for who can tell him how it shall be? [8.] No man hath power over the wind,[p] to confine the wind; and none [hath] power over the day of death; and none [hath] ability to grant escape in battle; thus wickedness doth not deliver them with whom it is.

Let us see what some of the precepts of wisdom are.

(1.) Submission to authority.

(2.) Discernment of time and judgment.

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[j] All the ellipses which are adopted on the supposition that אני is the ordinary pronoun of the first person, are so intolerably harsh that the present translator has no hesitation in treating the word here (as in Hos. v. 2, and Ps. lxxxix. 47) as an interjection, like הֲנֵה, with which (as perhaps with נָא also) it may be etymologically connected.

[k] Literally, "mouth."

[l] שְׁמֹר is here treated as a Piel imperative apocopated, like בְּנֵי; and signifying "exalt by obeying." It is indeed true that there is no other Biblical instance of a Piel conjugation in this verb; but there are such in Rabbinic Hebrew, with which the language of Koheleth has some points in common.

[m] *i.e.* What the ruler has made thee swear to do. For the use of the word אלהים in the sense of "a ruler," cf. Ex. xxii. 27 (Heb.)., Ps. lxxxii. 1.

[n] Or, "Be not disturbed [when thou goest] out of his sight:" *i.e.*, do not do what might cause an alarming dismissal.

[o] Or, "much against him."

[p] "Wind" is the rendering of Mendelssohn, Preston, and others cited in Ginsburg. He himself, with numerous other authorities, renders "spirit." But the last half of the verse shows that we must not expect a *parallelism;* and then the rendering "spirit" would make the second clause of the verse a mere tautological repetition of the first.

[9.] All this I saw, when I applied my mind to every work which [was] being done under the sun, [at] a time when one man had power over another man to his hurt. [10.] And in the same way I saw wicked men buried, yea men who had been wont to come, and had been wont to walk[q] at a distance from[r] the place of [any] holy [man], and they were wont to be forgotten in the city where they had so done. This also [was] vanity. [11.] Because sentence against the practice of evil is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the children of men is fully [bent] within them to do evil. [12.] Yea, a sinner doeth evil an hundred times, and [yet] prolongeth his days: although I know nevertheless that it is wont to be well for them that fear God, to the end that they may fear before Him,[s] [13.] and it is not wont to be well for the wicked [man], and he doth not prolong his days; [which are] as a shadow, seeing that he feareth not before God. [14.] There is, [it may be said again,] a vain thing which [was] being done upon the earth, in that [as] there were righteous [men] unto whom an event [was] happening like the event [which happeneth] to the wicked,[t] so there were wicked [men] unto whom an event [was] happening like the event [which happeneth] to the righteous: I said that this also [is] vanity. [15.] Therefore I was wont to commend cheerfulness [on the ground] that [there was] nothing good for man

There is, however, vanity here also. Wicked men do not always meet with the punishment they deserve:

and although I am persuaded that on the whole it is well with those who fear God, and ill with those who do not,

yet on the other hand, there are some men whose circumstances are just the opposite from what, on the rule just mentioned, we should have expected.

So that the old conclusion recurs, that pleasure and cheerfulness are the

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[q] *i.e.* To live, as in iv. 15.

[r] For this sense of מן, cf. Jonah ii. 1, "Then Jonah prayed unto the LORD his God *in separation from* the fish's belly," *i.e. after he had come out of* the fish's belly; Prov. xx. 3, "It is an honour to a man to dwell *apart from* strife."

[s] The rendering "which fear before Him" (E. V.), or, more literally, "which are wont to fear before Him," is grammatical, but tautological.

[t] Literally, "like the event of the wicked."

under the sun, save to eat and to drink and to be cheerful, since that is wont to cleave to him in his toil [during] the days of his life which God hath given him under the sun.

best things which man has.

[16.] When I applied my mind to know wisdom and to see the business which [was] being done upon the earth, [and] in which[u] neither by day nor by night did one see sleep with one's eyes;

And the general conclusion is,

[17.] then I saw all the work of God, that man cannot find out the work which [is] being done under the sun: in that while man may toil in seeking, he can nevertheless not find it out, and even though the wise man may say that he knoweth it, [yet] can he not find it out.[v] [IX. 1.] For with respect to all this I had applied my heart,[w] even with the purpose of investigating[x] all this: on the assumption that the righteous and the wise and their works are in the hand of God, both love and hatred[y] no man knoweth;[z] all [had place] before them.[a]

that the rule of the world's order is inscrutable.

And so the manifestation also of the Divine attributes according to which the order of the world is carried on.

[2.] All things [come] alike to all: there is one event to the righteous and to the wicked; to the good and to the clean, and to the unclean: to him that sacrificeth, and to him that sacrificeth not: as [is] the good man, so [is] the sinner; and he that sweareth [falsely[b] is] as he by whom

For all men die alike;

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[u] Literally, "for." The כי here is practically equivalent to באשר.

[v] So far from knowing it, he cannot arrive even at the necessary preliminary—the finding it out.

[w] Literally, "I had put into my heart," *i.e.* I had established as an axiom from which to reason.

[x] This verb occurs nowhere else. The rendering of it which we have adopted is that of Gesenius.

[y] *i.e.* The love and hatred in general which might have fallen to the lot of each; including most chiefly the love and hatred which might (speaking after the manner of men) be shown towards them by God in His sovereignty.

[z] *i.e.* That this is a case in which the remark made in *v.* 1 is applicable.

[a] *i.e.* Whatever love or hatred God may have shown towards them was (so to say) felt by him long before they were born. Cf. Mal. i. 2, 3, as used by St. Paul, Rom. ix. 11—13.

[b] "To swear" in Hebrew sometimes means "to swear *falsely*," just as with us "to swear" often means "to swear *profanely*." See Zech. v. 3, and cf. *v.* 4.

an oath is reverenced. [3.] This [seemed] evil in all which [was] being done under the sun, that one event did happen to all: and moreover the heart of the children of men [was] full of evil, and [that] madness [was] in their heart while they lived, and afterwards they went to the dead. [4.] For[c] to him who is associated with all the living [there is] hope: for [even] a dog which liveth [is] better [off] than [even] a lion which is dead.[d] [5.] For the living know that they shall—die! but the dead know not anything, neither have they more a reward, seeing that their memorial is cut off. [6.] Moreover the love, and the hatred, and the envy which they had experienced[e] is already perished, and they have no portion any longer for ever in anything which [is] being done under the sun. [7.] "Go thy way," [it will thus have to be said,] "eat thy bread with cheerfulness and drink thy wine with a merry heart, for now [is the time when] God hath found pleasure in thy works. [8.] Let thy garments be white at all times, and let thy head lack no ointment. [9.] Live joyfully[f] with the wife whom thou lovest, all the days of thy vain life which He gave thee under the sun, all thy vain days [I say], for that is thy portion in life, and in thy toil which thou [art] toiling out under the sun. [10.] Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do in [the time of] thy ability,[g] seeing that there is no work, nor sophisms, nor knowledge, nor

while they live they are full of madness;

and however much men may extol the advantages of life,

the only advantage is that, whereas the dead know nothing, the living do know — that they must die!

So that the present life is all to which we can look in reference to our present argument.

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[c] This "for" introduces an explanation of "evil" (*v.* 3), to show what makes the contemplated case an evil one.

[d] The first clause of the next verse shows that this verse is ironical.

[e] Literally, "their love and their hatred and their envy."

[f] Literally, "see life."

[g] *i.e.* Whilst thou art able, just as בְּחַיָּיו in Is. liii. 9 means "while He was dead." So LXX.

wisdom, in *Sheôl*[h] whither thou [art] going."

[11.] I saw again[i] under the sun, that the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, neither bread to the wise, neither riches to the prudent, neither favour to them that have knowledge, but there happeneth to each of them, all alike, [his] time[j] and [his] mischance. [12.] For neither doth man know his time: as the fishes which are taken in an evil net, and as the birds which are taken in a snare, like them, I say, are the children of men snared at an evil time when it shall come upon them suddenly. [13.] The following [instance of] wisdom also I saw under the sun, and it was great unto me: [14.] [there was] a little city,[k] the men wherein were few: and there came a great king against it and surrounded it, and built great ramparts against it. [15.] But there was found in it a poor man [who was] wise, and he by his wisdom delivered the city: yet no man remembered that same poor man. [16.] And I said, "Wisdom is better than strength: yea, [better is] even the poor man's wisdom [which is] despised, and his words [which are] not heard.[l] [17.] Wise men's words [which are] heard in quiet [are worth] more than the cry of one that ruleth among fools. [18.] Wisdom is better than weapons of war. One sinner however[m] may destroy much good. [X. 1.]

And a similar conclusion follows from the fact that certain actions and qualifications fail sometimes to issue in their proper results:

Since those actions may be (and continually are) interrupted at any time by death.

And even where the proper results do follow, they sometimes fail of being appreciated by those who receive the benefit of them.

Wisdom is no doubt an excellent thing; but much wisdom may be

[h] *i.e.* The place of departed spirits, commonly called *Hades* ("*Hell*" in the Apostles' Creed); and in which the souls of all the dead were kept till the Lord descended thereinto.

[i] Literally, "I returned, even [so as] to see."

[j] The Hebrew word may mean either "time of adversity," or "time of prosperity." In the present instance the context shows that it is used in the former sense.

[k] If this book was written by Hezekiah, the events here described may have taken place when "Sennacherib king of Assyria came up against all the defenced cities of Judah, and took them" (Is. xxxvi. 1).

[l] So LXX.

[m] Or, "therefore:" the meaning, however, of this passage will be the same.

[Where there are] dead flies, [even] the ointment of the apothecary will send forth a stinking savour: [so] a little folly is [with some men] of more account than wisdom [and] than honour. [2.] The mind of a wise man [is] at his right hand; but the mind of a fool [is] at his left.[n] [3.] Yea also, when the fool walketh by the way, his wisdom faileth him, and he saith to every one [that] he is a fool."[o] [4.] [But then,] if the spirit of him that ruleth [among fools] riseth against thee, leave not thy place;[p] for gentleness[q] will cause great sins[r] to cease.[s]

rendered void by a little folly.

[5.] There is an evil [which] I saw under the sun, [to be] like an error which proceeded from the sovereign: [6.] folly was set in many high places, and men of honour[t] were habitually dwelling in abasement. [7.] I saw slaves upon horses, and nobles walking like slaves upon the earth. [8.] [On the other hand,] one that diggeth a pit shall fall into it; and one that pulleth down a wall, a serpent shall bite him. [9.] One that removeth stones shall be hurt therewith: one that cleaveth wood shall be endangered thereby. [10.] If the iron be blunt, the edge not having been whetted, then will one have to apply a strong force: wisdom therefore hath an advantage tending to success.[u] [11.] If the serpent shall

Again, folly is sometimes exalted at the expense of wisdom,

and the endeavour to set matters right will often bring only harm on him who makes the attempt.

---

[n] *i.e.* What little sense the fool has he has not sense to use for profit.

[o] *i.e.* A fool has not the skill to conceal the real nature of his foolish mind, but manifests it in the most open manner.

[p] *i.e.* Do not resign thy office in sullen indignation.

[q] So G.V.

[r] *i.e.* The deeds of such a "sinner" as had been mentioned above, ix. 18.

[s] *sc.* And thus thy wisdom may after all undo the mischief which the ruler's folly may have caused.

[t] The primary meaning of the word is "rich." Here, however, it must be used in a sense implying *moral* worth; otherwise there would be no force in the antithesis with reference to the writer's present argument.

[u] Literally, "an advantage of success." Wisdom is what was metaphorically denoted by the sharpness of the iron.

have bitten, [there will be] no [use for] enchantment: and an eloquent man[v] hath no advantage. [12.] The words of a wise man's mouth [are, "Show] favour:" but the lips of a fool [say] "Destroy it."[w] [13.] The beginning of the words of his mouth [is] folly: and the conclusion of his speech[x] [is] evil madness. [14.] [It is] the fool, moreover, [who] multiplieth words: man knoweth not what shall be: and that which shall be thereafter who will tell him?[y] [15.] The toil of fools wearieth each of them, because he knoweth not how to go to the city.[z]

[16.] Woe to thee, O land, when thy king is a child, and thy princes eat in the morning! [17.] Happy art thou, O land, when thy king is noble, and thy princes eat in due season, for strength, and not for drunkenness! [18.] By double slothfulness the building will decay; and by slackness of hands there will be a dropping through the house,[a] [19.] to the laughter of[b] such as produce bread, and wine [which] cheereth life, and [whose] money answereth all things. [20.] [Yet the proverb holds good which saith]—

"Mention not a king lightly,[c] even in thy thought,

And though the abuses in the state may justify the common trite sayings about the sources of a nation's prosperity,

yet it is best for thy own safety not to harbour even a thought of reformation.

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[v] *i.e.* A man who has tongue without mind. The meaning of this verse is—When the harm just described (*v.* 8) comes, it will be irremediable, and all your eloquence will not ward it off.

[w] *i.e.* A wise man counsels favour to existing institutions whenever it can be shown, but a fool counsels destructive levelling wherever levelling can be done. Wisdom, therefore, has a *conservative* character. Cf. Prov. xii. 6, where we have the same idea:—"The words of the wicked [are,] 'Lie in wait for blood!' but the mouth of the upright will deliver them."

[x] Literally "mouth."

[y] *sc.* And therefore in talking so much he only proves himself a fool—possessed of tongue without mind.

[z] *i.e.* He knows not those things which are simplest and most commonly known, such as the high road to the capital.

[a] What King James's translators meant by *the house dropping through* is not very clear. The Hebrew verb means to drop as rain—here, of course, to drop through the dilapidated roof.

[b] So Preston.

[c] Or, "curse not."

And mention not a noble lightly
[even] in thy bedchamber:
For a bird of the heaven may carry
the sound,
And one which hath wings may tell
the matter."

[XI. 1.] Cast thy bread upon the waters;[d] though it should be many days ere thou find it. [2.] Give a portion to seven, and also to eight, for thou knowest not what evil may be upon the earth. [3.] If the clouds are full of rain, they will empty [themselves] upon the earth: and whether the stick[e] fall in the south [quarter] or in the north, the place where the stick falleth, that [is] where it [will lie].[f] [4.] One who [merely] observeth the wind will not sow; and one who [merely] gazeth on the clouds will not reap. [5.] As thou knowest not what is the way of the spirit[g] while the bones [are growing] in the womb of her that is with child, even so thou knowest not the work of God Who appointeth[h] all things. [6.] In the morning sow thy seed, and in the evening withhold not thine hand: for thou knowest not which shall succeed, whether this or that, or whether they

And however bad times may be, or threaten to be, charity can never be wrong or unadvisable; and its liberal exercise will always be preferable to such folly as that of soothsaying:

more especially considering the very limited extent of human knowledge:

for our ignorance should lead to activity rather than to remissness.

[d] "Hospitality, so universally practised in the East, is here recommended under seemingly the most compromising circumstances. Bread in the East is made in cake-like shape; it is very thin, and more like what we should call flaps. The passover bread, to the present day, is not thicker than the blade of a knife, round and oval, and about nine or ten inches in diameter (Jahn, 'Biblical Antiq.' § 140; Kitto, 'Cyclop. Bib. Lit.' under *Bread*), so that, when put into a stream, it would float for a time and be carried away by the current. Hence the force of the allusion in this admonition. We are to be charitable to thankless people, when the bread we have bestowed seems as if cast upon the surface of the water, where it is irrevocably borne away by the rapidly flowing stream; since we cannot tell whether in the process of time we may not reap the benefit of it. The Arabs have a similar proverb, *Do good, cast thy bread into the water, thou shalt be repaid some day.*"—GINSBURG.

[e] For this sense of the Hebrew word, cf. 2 Kings vi. 6.

[f] The reference in this verse seems to be to divination by observing the clouds in their shapes or motions, and also by casting a stick into the air and noting the direction in which it falls. So Mendelssohn and Preston. Cf. Hos. iv. 12.

[g] *i.e.* The way by which the spirit comes to the embryo in its formation. So the Targum paraphrases it.

[h] So Preston.

shall both be alike good. [7.] Sweet also [is] the light, and good [it is] for the eyes to behold the sun. [8.] But [if] man live many years, in all of which he hath cheerfulness, yet let him remember the days of darkness; for they will be many. All that cometh [is] vanity! [9.] Be cheerful, O young man, in thy youth, and let thy heart make thee merry in the days of thy youth, and walk in the ways of thine heart, and in the sight of thine eyes; but know thou that God will bring thee into judgment concerning all these [things]. [10.] And remove vexation from thy heart, and put away harm from thy body,[i] seeing that youth, like[j] morning-time, [is] vanity. [XII. 1.] But remember thy Creator in the days of thy youth, while the evil days come not, nor the years whereof thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them: [2.][k]

And while a man enjoys the gifts which God has given, he should remember that old age will one day come on,

and a time of judgment:

and remember his Creator before that time arrives.

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[i] Cf. ii. 3.

[j] Literally, "and."

[k] The passage here commencing has been very variously interpreted. Most commentators have seen in its several clauses metaphorical reference to the several accompaniments of old age, the symptoms of advancing decay and approaching death. Ginsburg admits the general reference, but rejects the idea of metaphor in the details. According to him, the description is that of an approaching storm, and the effects which its observed approach may produce on the inmates of a real house. And no doubt this explanation serves very well as far as the mention of the almond in *v.* 5; but why the approach of a storm should make people loathe almonds, locusts, and caper-berries, he does not explain. Moreover, when he gets to *v.* 6, he admits metaphor in detail as well as any one else; now, if we may admit it in detail there, why not in the verses before?

Looking for such clues as we may have in the text itself for our right interpretation of it, we notice that the sacred writer does himself define in the plainest terms what times they are of which he is here speaking. In *v.* 1 we meet with the expression "the evil days, and the years whereof thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them:" and these are mentioned in contrast to the days of youth. Further on, we have the times in question defined as those in which "man is going to his long home, and the mourners are going about in the streets." Some more description follows, *v.* 6, which is acknowledged by all to be metaphorical, and which is closed with these words: "What time the dust returneth to the earth as it was, and the spirit returneth to God who gave it."

There can be no doubt, then, that *vv.* 2 to 5 describe the approach of death, and *v.* 6 death itself. In the notes which follow we shall state what seems to us the most preferable interpretation of the several details, as far as we have been able to form an opinion.

while the sun, and the light, and the moon, and the stars, are not darkened,[1] and the clouds return not after the rain:[m] [3.] in the day when the keepers of the house[n] tremble, and the strong ones bow themselves, and the grinding women cease after they have been made few,[o] and they that look out of windows have darkness, [4.] and the doors[p] in the streets are shut when the sound of grinding is low, and [one] riseth up at the [mere] voice of a bird, and all the daughters of song are brought low: [5.] when, moreover, [men] are afraid of [aught which is] high,[q] and fears [are] in the way, and the almond doth cause disgust,[r] and the locust shall be

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[1] By the darkening of the heavenly bodies (*i.e.* their being hidden from the individual man's sight) we would understand the darkening of those several faculties of the spirit and mind, whereby man takes in religious and other truth.

[m] What is meant by this we have no conception. Mendelssohn's remark hereon is, "By reason of old age the moisture of the eyes becomes thickened; and often it seems to him [the old man] in consequence, as if clouds passed before his eyes which hide the light, or, in other words, impair his sight..."

[n] The interpretation of this verse is not so difficult. The "keepers of the house" are the arms or the hands, which shake as the vital force diminishes. The "strong ones" are the legs, which in aged persons are often bent. The "grinding women" are the teeth, and "they that look out of windows" are the eyes.

[o] Literally, "when [some] have made [them] few."

[p] "'The doors' signify the outward apertures of the body, and 'the sound of the grinding' refers to the digestion of food and its being ground and dissolved in the stomach" [rather, we should say, ground by the teeth]; "for when this is impeded, all the bodily organs are obstructed in their functions. 'And one will start up at a bird's note,' means that the old man will be roused from his sleep even by the chirping of a bird. 'And all the daughters of song shall be brought low.' This implies that the pipes of the lungs from which the voice proceeds shall fail in performing their functions; for an old man, from weakness, is unable to sing or exert his voice." (Mendelssohn, in Preston.) In the words "one riseth up at the mere voice of a bird," the writer leaves metaphor and describes literally the man's starting up at the slightest sound.

[q] In this verse also metaphor is dropped, and the writer describes how in old age men are afraid of climbing heights, and fear the inequalities of the ground when they walk, lest they should stumble and fall. Also (if our rendering of the latter part of the verse is correct, in which we have followed Ginsburg) how the most palatable articles of food become tasteless.

[r] יִנְאַץ = יִנְאָץ. And as in Kal the verb means "to loathe," in Hiphil it must mean "to cause loathing." In this and the next two clauses the rendering is that of Ginsburg, which we have adopted, not as feeling perfectly sure of its correctness, but merely because it seems to be the least

loathed,[s] and the caper-berry[t] shall be powerless, because man [is] going to his long home, and the mourners are ever going[u] about in the streets [6.] while the silver cord[v] is not loosed, or the golden bowl broken, or the pitcher broken at the fountain, or the wheel broken at the cistern, [7.] what time the dust returneth to the earth as it was, and the spirit returneth to God who gave it.

[8.] Most vain! said the Koheleth: most vain! all [is] vanity!

I can say but the same thing—all is vanity. But with all the vanity, there is still some wisdom in the world; and here is the result of mine:—

[9.] But because Koheleth was more wise, he hath [thus] been long a teacher of knowledge[w] to the people, and was wont to listen well,[x] and to search [things] out: [thus] hath he set in order an abundance of proverbs.[y] [10.] Koheleth sought to find out acceptable words, and a writing [which[z] was] upright, [even] words of truth: [11.] [considering that] the words of wise men [are] as goads, yea, as fastened nails[a] [which belong to] masters of assemblies, [and which] have been put forth from one thinker.[b]

improbable out of a most doubtful number.

[s] Literally, "make itself a burden."

[t] So LXX. and Vulg. The caper-berry is eaten to provoke appetite. Kitto, "Cyclop. Bib. Lit.," under *Abiyonah*, cited by Ginsburg.

[u] Future tense, expressive of a habit.

[v] What details are intended by these metaphors is little else than conjecture. What the four articles denote, the names of which are here employed, viz., the cord, the bowl, the pitcher, and the wheel; and whether there is any special meaning in the materials of which the four are supposed to be made, silver, gold, clay (or metal ?), and wood. Thus much only can we say with any probability of correctness, that the "bowl" is the bowl of a lamp (cf. Zech. iv. 2), and the "cord" is that by which the lamp is suspended, and on the giving way of which the lamp falls to the ground, the oil is spilt, and the light goes out.

[w] *sc.* In the book which is now being concluded. This is also the view of the same learned friend to whose view reference is made in the Introduction, § 2.

[x] This and the following verb are treated in the translation as converted preterites with frequentative signification. They may, however, be simple aorists, by reason of the preterite חכם just before.

[y] viz. Those proverbs which are to be found in the present work.

[z] So LXX., G.V.

[a] Not merely like goads which prick the oxen for a moment and are then withdrawn, but like nails, which are driven in and hold.

[b] This is substantially the rendering of Mendelssohn and Preston.

[12.] But be thou, my son, more admonished than they:[c] of making many books [there is] no end, and abundance of study [is] a weariness of the body.

[13.] Let us hear the entire conclusion of the matter: Fear God and keep His commandments: for this [is] the whole of man.[d] [14.] For God will bring every work into judgment, with everything [which is] hidden,[e] whether [it be] good or whether [it be] evil.

and the sum of the whole matter is this precept—*Fear God and keep His commandments*—grounded on the certainty of *a general judgment by Him.*

[c] *i.e.* Be more ready to hear and receive admonition from others than to occupy thyself with thy own works and lucubrations, as it may be conjectured that most of the "masters of assemblies" did in Koheleth's time.

[d] So LXX. and Vulg.

[e] "Hidden," and whereof therefore man is at present ignorant.

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